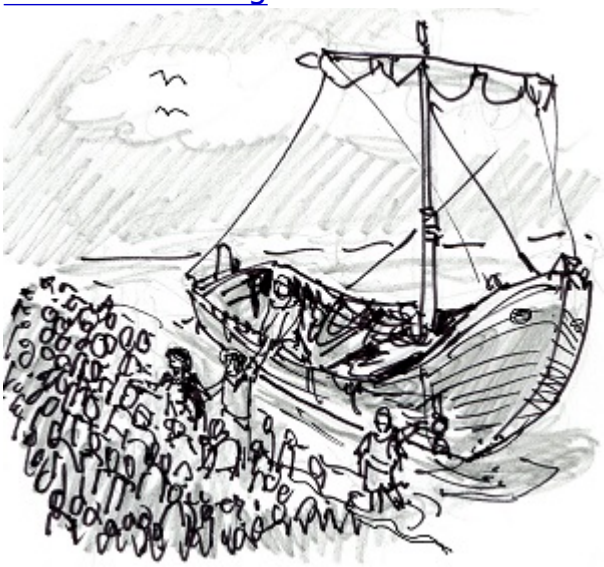
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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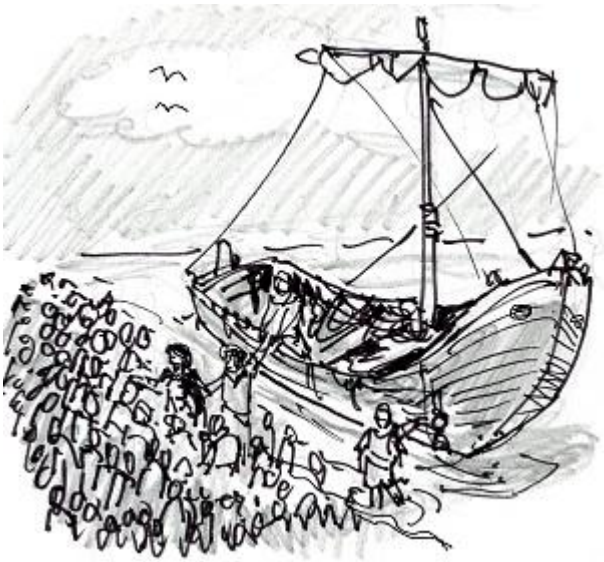

"Jesus got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore" (Matt 13:2).

Jer 1:1, 4-10; *Mt 13:1-9*

The setting of Jesus' parables in Matthew 13 is itself a parable. Jesus chooses as his classroom the shore by the Sea of Galilee. There, because of the large crowd, he gets into a boat and withdraws just far enough for everyone to see and hear him. He sits down, as all Jewish teachers did and as the pope does when he speaks officially. From his pulpit on the water Jesus begins to speak about the Kingdom of God to the people standing on the shore.

The mystery of the Kingdom is best conveyed on water, for dry land is firm and predictable, a secure place to stand and to know where you are. The ways of God are instead a flowing reality, ever changing, shallow and deep, familiar but often dangerous, unpredictable and full of surprises. If you take a boat out far enough into deep water, you are at its mercy.

No one captured the difference between dry land and the sea better than Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*. In its opening scene we meet Ishmael, a young man who is eager to escape the bland confines of *terra firma* for the adventures to be found on the high seas. He would rather engage the dangerous beauty of the ocean than the safety of a job on shore, a family in a frame house and all the obligations that come with it. To go to sea was to be free, even if it meant shipwreck and an early death.

Anyone fortunate to live near an ocean, lake or river knows the power of water to inspire wonder and to reconnect us deeply with nature. Sacramentally, water is a symbol of both death and life, our baptismal passage into Christ. Jesus trained his disciples on the lake during storms to prepare them to recognize his risen presence and the many mysteries of the faith that transcend the horizons of reason and logic.

We take our chances as disciples by surrendering our lives to Providence and to the Paschal Mystery, inviting us to lose ourselves to find ourselves in Christ. In the days to come, as Matthew lays out for us the parables of Jesus, we must also learn to enter the zone of mystery as we listen and apply these images to our lives. Hear then a parable, about a sower who went out to sow, the treasure in the field, the search for fine pearls, the mustard seed and the dragnet. Each little story is a portal to deeper faith, a small boat in deep water, a passage to the heart of God.

It is time to go to sea, to learn to lower our nets on the opposite side of the boat, to raise our sails to the wind, to ride out the storm, even to walk on water. Jesus the storyteller knows how to navigate our passage because he has made the passage himself on our behalf. His parables will chart our way to unseen adventures, and we know that we can trust him because he is the mercy of God.

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